

REGION OF MOZAMBIQUE

19

BIRTH

Birth takes place in the bush, some distance from the hamlet, in the presence of 844 female relatives of the woman and of her husband. If the child is stillborn, or miscarried, it is buried in the bush. The husband and wife must abstain from sexual intercourse 845 for some months, until a special ritual intercourse is performed. A man who breaks this taboo is liable to contract a fatal disease, *Amasanga*. Difficult births are attributed to: (a) a curse spoken by a matrilineal relative—this is made effective by the intervention of the ancestors, and to remove it it is necessary to perform a rite making clear that no malice is borne; (b) the adultery of the woman or her husband, in which case confession will save the woman from dying; and (c) sorcery.

If a child is born alive it is brought to the hut of the mother or one of her female relatives, where it is secluded until its naming ceremony, about six days later. Only 844 after the naming is the child considered to be a member of society. A second child 852 should not be born while the first is still suckling, i.e. for about two years. When the child is about four or five months old it is ritually immunized against the dangers of sexual activity, and the parents may resume relations. Elaborate magical precautions are taken to ensure the child's survival. Children sleep with their mother, the boys until 853 they are old enough to go to the boys' dormitory, and the girls until marriage.¹

INITIATION

The yearly initiation ceremonies, *uyaga*, are the principal cultural institution of the Yao. That for the boys, *lapanda*, is the most important, and may only take place under 881 a chief or superior village headman, whereas a girls' initiation ceremony may take 852 place under an ordinary headman. The right to hold a boys' initiation ceremony therefore becomes a mark of status which is jealously disputed.² The right is expressed as 854 'having a circle'. A circle is the small basket in which the special sacrificial flour is carried.

Yao carry out initiation between the ages of seven and eleven, whereas generally in East Africa it is postponed until puberty.³ In response to requests from the headmen the chief appoints the time and place of the boys' initiation ceremony for a group of villages. It is held at the end of the dry season, before the bush is burned. Each initiate is accompanied by a sponsor, *shumani*, who may be a brother, uncle, or friend. Before they set out for the place appointed to be *lapanda*, they all assemble before the chief to be anointed with millet-flour specially prepared by his head wife. The word *lapanda* refers to a forked stick over which the sacrificial flour is poured. This stick is planted at the place of assembly, the *manakana*. The boys, their sponsors, and the master of communion, *u'mirira*, are accompanied with dancing as far as *manakana* by their friends. The next day the initiates go to a spot in the bush, where the circumcision (formerly only an incision) is performed, and remain in the bush school, *ndagala*, for about two months, until the wounds are completely healed. The Yao circumcision rite is said not to have been introduced by the Arabs.⁴

During these weeks the boys are subjected to rigorous discipline and instructed in various skills and tribal lore. They sleep in long dormitory huts, with partitions dividing the boys of different villages from each other. The chief appoints the day for

¹ Warren, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-2.² Shumani and Dandoy, *op. cit.*, p. 170.³ Duff, *op. cit.*, p. 322.⁴ Livingston, 1874, p. 81.

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881 return to the *apanda*, where the initiates are welcomed by their friends. An essential
 852 part of the ceremony which takes place at this stage is the exhibition of animal shapes
 made by the *w'micira*, with mounds of earth outlined in flour. These animal shapes
 differ from lodge to lodge. On the last night before the return to the village the
 initiates undergo a ceremonial bathing, each boy being carried to the stream by a
 553 woman, who thereafter is addressed as 'elder sister'. Finally, with new names, and
 freshly oiled and decorated, they march to the chief's village to be redeemed by him
 571 from the *w'micira* with gifts of cloth. After initiation it is a deadly insult to call a boy
 by his child-name. All who pass through initiation together consider themselves
 bound by mutual obligations of hospitality.¹

Girls' initiation takes place in three stages. First, there is *ciputu*, the general initiation
 before puberty, which corresponds to the boys' *apanda*. It takes place at the same
 time of year, and though it lasts for less than a week, its conclusion is celebrated at
apanda jointly with the conclusion of the boys' initiation. A hut is built in the bush,
 like the long dormitory of the boys, and four days are spent in dancing and singing.
 Each girl (aged about eight years) is accompanied by a sponsor, a woman friend who
 continues to be her mentor during subsequent rites, and who assists in giving the girl
 instruction in her womanly duties. At the end the girls are bathed and anointed,
 dressed in new clothes, and each is carried to *apanda* by her sponsor. Here they prove
 their skill in dancing and receive gifts from their friends. Ritual defecation follows the
 304 *ciputu* initiation.² Among Mohammedans, clitoridectomy used to be performed by a
 177 woman operator, but, it is said, was discontinued in about 1903 on account of the
 heavy mortality.³

After this first general celebration, first pregnancy and first birth are the occasions
 883 of separate rites for each girl. According to some informants there were once two
 848 ceremonies connected with pregnancy. One, for the young married men whose wives
 861 had not yet conceived, used to take place at the same time as *ciputu*; each man was
 attended by a woman sponsor not his wife, given good advice, and put through various
 tests of manhood. Mitchell does not confirm the present existence of this ceremony,
 but in the old days if a man was betrothed or married to a child going through her
ciputu he had to accompany her.

883 The *litise* ceremony takes place when a young married woman quickens with child
 776 for the first time.⁴ The woman, with her sponsor and the married women of the
 neighbourhood, went out in procession for a ceremony of singing and dancing and
 instruction to the young couple, followed by a feast. Nowadays no men are allowed
 887 to attend *litise*. A child born of a woman who had not undergone this rite used to be
 buried alive; nowadays her *anywa mumba* is charged by the chief.

886 Finally, six days after the first child is born, its naming ceremony forms a last
 553 initiation rite for its mother. The husband is formally led into her hut by her sponsor
 and the married women of the neighbourhood, and the child is taken out for the first
 time to the accompaniment of feasting and dancing.

881 Most Yao men and women act as sponsors of initiates at least once, and all parti-

852 ¹ Sources for boys' initiation: Shannon and Derry, 1913; Warner, 1908, pp. 124-6; Shannon, c.
 1920, pp. 247-63; Mitchell, 1931, pp. 20-24; Johnston, 1897, p. 409; Wade, c. 1900, p. 304.

² Shannon, c. 1902, p. 236.

³ Ibid., c. 1902, p. 298.

⁴ Ibid., c. 1902, p. 274; Mitchell, 1931, p. 23, calls it *cinundu* (belly).

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cipato yearly in the great initiation festival for boys and girls. Consequently as they repeat each year the lessons of their own initiation, the ceremonies are the main vehicle of Yao culture.⁸¹ 88/ 852

There are also two Moslem ceremonies:

(1) *Jende*, the boys' Moslem baptism, which takes about seven days, and is usually worked in with *Isande*: 81/ 852 177

(2) *Nsande*, the girls' Moslem baptism, which is the same as *jende*, but usually quite separate from *cipato*. It is important that the wife of a Moslem should have her *nsande* so that she knows how to prepare the food properly at Ramadan.

MENSTRUATION AND OTHER TABOOS

Menstruation is held to be dangerous. A special mat is used by the woman during this time, and is rolled up and kept during the rest of the cycle. The hut is completely replastered after menstruation. Intercourse during menses leads to disease of the man. Sexual contact is dangerous to persons at certain other periods: during initiation ceremonies, during mourning, and for babies who have not been through the protective rite. The danger is thought to lie in *ndaka*, a dread disease characterized by swelling. This may be transmitted by salt in the food. Deaths are often attributed to 'salt'. Much of the significance of the mourning is that medicines are prepared which protect the mourners against the dangers attendant on sexual activity. 84/ 834

BURIAL RITES

News of a death must be sent to the chief by a messenger carrying a single fowl. The chief gives a present of calico for wrapping the body, and a goat for the burial men. These are called *awile*, neighbours unrelated to the dead, who volunteer for certain duties. They prepare the body for burial and carry it in procession to the graveyard outside the village. No uninitiated person is allowed to see the funeral. All who attend the burial are prohibited from sexual intercourse for one month. After this time the prohibition is lifted by a ceremony of beer drinking and feasting, and on the following day all fires in the village are extinguished, and then relit, and the mourners are shaved. A year later beer is brewed for a final ceremony. 76/ 203 151

For a period after her husband's death a widow is unclean, and has to be purified by ritual intercourse with a man who is paid. The widow is not allowed to remarry for two or three years. A widower leaves his wife's village, after receiving a parting gift. The widows of ordinary persons are not inherited. If a man has himself a 'name' (rank and social position), he has an heir, who inherits also the wives of his predecessor. But if the heir (the maternal nephew) has married a cross-cousin (mother's brother's daughter) he would not consider the wife's mother as his inherited wife. 76/ 58 57

Before the burial the dead man's hut used to be destroyed, together with his possessions. Immediately afterwards a consultation is held as to whether retaliatory action against sorcerers is called for. The *awile*'s duties include not only the conducting of the burial, but also the subsequent inquiry and the conduct of the second ceremony, the beer drinking, at which they shave the mourners. A man who has 76/ 76

⁸¹ Main sources for girls' initiation: Ninkal, 1925, p. 19; Swenson, 1, 1919, pp. 182-7; 2, 1920, pp. 269-70; Swenson and Derry, 1921; Duff, 1922, pp. 212-13; Abdallah, 1924, pp. 18-19; Macdonald, 1924, vol. 5, pp. 102-20; Warner, 1926, pp. 161-7; Johnson, 1927, p. 470.

843 *Pregnancy and childbirth.* An event of the first importance in the Yao world is the
 842 first conception or rather the "quickening" with the first child, *Lilim*; this is described
 below, together with the other ceremonies of the *Ungaga*.¹ After the ceremony of *Lilim*,
 the period of waiting until the birth of the child passes without further event. A point of
 medical interest is that native women suffer in many cases from "morning sickness" dur-
 [7] ing pregnancy. That they may have perverted appetites is also recognized, grain beans
 and milk being among the things most commonly desired. As the *Ampaja*,² the Yao
 believe that the child develops from the semen of the male, although the growth of the
 child is in some way associated with the mother.

641 When labor commences, the woman retires to the bush a few hundred yards away from
 her house, attended by some friend, seldom a midwife, and served by her own people, though
 the mother and the mother-in-law will probably be near the spot. If labor is not completed
 by evening, they return to the house and the birth may take place actually within its walls.
 [7] The attitude assumed in labor is the same as that adopted by the *Ampaja*,³ the patient
 semi-reclining in the arms of another woman who sits behind, grasping her belly. The
 vulva is anointed with a decoction made from the bark of the *agave* tree as a lubricant, but
 no other help is given. *Kandali* is the name given to the phase of confinement; it lasts
 some two hours when the woman remains for a period after the confinement. The Yao
 recognize the protruding bag of amniotic fluid and call it the "oil-gourd". "Chinai shi-
 shi?" (The oil-gourd, has it broken?) They wait until the placenta is delivered before
 dividing the cord. This is done with the sharp edge of the outer covering of a maize stalk
 or sugar cane; a knife is never used. The section is made near the placenta or half-way be-
 tween it and the child, after tying the proximal end with a bark string.

The woman who receives the child at birth is the *ambwaga*, friend or godmother. If
 the infant is born in the bush, she carries it back to the house whither they go as soon as
 labor is completed. The mother herself, unless she is very ill, goes out shortly afterwards
 and buries the placenta in the ash-heap, using a stick to dig the hole, never a hoe.

647 After the birth, the mother and child must remain in the house until the umbilical cord
 646 separates, during which time the husband does not enter, though he may come to the
 door to look in at the child.

The day on which exit from the house is made, the floor is actively regarrisoned with mud.
 652 The baby's head is shaved and a cross is made upon it with *agave*, a kind of red pigment.
 653 The husband may then receive the child and in the case of a first-born, it is he who gives it
 303 its name; other children may be named by the *ambwaga*, the mother, or the aunt.

When the mother leaves the house to appear in public, the *ambwaga* who put her *Lilim*
 on, removes it.

So long as the infant remains in the house, care must be taken as to persons allowed to
 handle it. A woman who has recently had a menstrual period or union with her husband,

¹ *Vide* *ibid.*, p. 271.² *Stanuš*, *op. cit.*, p. 222.³ *Ibid.*⁴ *Vide* *ibid.*, p. 271.